

## **SOME SLANTS ON OFFICIAL PERFINS**

**Dave Hill**

I was invited to attend a display by David Milstead at a meeting of the GB Overprint Society at Philatex. The display was on the Office of Works overprints and perfins and gave me food for thought on considering the wider aspects of official overprints and perfins. Most interestingly David had found at the Public Record Office at Kew, Sloper's letter acknowledging that they would perforate stamps for the Office of Works. The Office of Works comprised of about 100 people in offices spread round the country looking after Royal Residences and public buildings.

But to start at the beginning (I think), the first official postage stamps were the Inland Revenue overprints, which the Inland Revenue approved for their own use (not surprisingly!). These official postage stamps were to ease accounting for postage by the Inland Revenue and to discourage the theft of stamps. Once the overprints were introduced the much smaller Office of Works and the Army asked for their own official overprints, (the army had their own problems as any postage stamps were seen as "fair game" by soldiers!). The Inland Revenue refused permission as they had theirs; and considered, in the Office of Works case, that the department was just too small.

The Office of Works having been refused by the Revenue, and seeing the Board of Trade using perfins, asked Slopers for their own perfins "as an experiment". Perhaps the Board of Trade had also been thwarted by the Revenue when they asked for overprints. Rather strangely it is thought the Revenue considered perfins unsafe, because of the thousands of perfin machines in private companies hands. They did not realise the difficulty of making a die, let alone the difficulty of making the "Crown over BT" die, or the ease of producing an overprint, with a John Bull printing set! And it seems that three out of four Office of Works overprints are forgeries! But of course they weren't produced as postal forgeries, just for us collectors! Likewise the forgeries of the Board of Trade perfins were for our benefit, I wonder what percentage of these perfins are forgeries? Incidentally the chief clerk of the Office of Works was a stamp collector, and the Army originally wanted stamps overprinted W.O. for war office, easily confused with the O.W. overprint of the Office of Works.

So the rare (and unforged?) Office of Works perfins were just an experiment and the small number of perfins were produced by Slopers who then either carefully stored the perfin dies or destroyed them. Whilst

# LETTER FROM SLOPER'S TO H.M. OFFICE OF WORKS

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS—  
"SLOPER, LONDON."

**Sloper's Patents**

The System of indelibly Cancelling, Dating, Marking or Numbering all kinds of Documents by Perforations,—viz.,  
Bankers' Cheques—Amounts on Credit Notes—Fees—Government Stamps—Ballot Papers—  
Trade Marks,—Railway Tickets, &c., to prevent Erasure or Fraud.  
Postage, Foreign Bill and Receipt Stamps perforated with Firms' Initials (J. SLOPER, Inventor).

Patented in America and the Chief Foreign Countries.

(ESTABLISHED OVER 40 YEARS).

Office—  
20, King William Street, City,  
London.

108592/95.

9<sup>th</sup> Aug 1895.

OFFICE OF WORKS  
5036  
12 AUG 1895

Colver Royal Works,  
West Hampstead, N.W.

*Sir,*

In reply to your enquiry of the 8<sup>th</sup> inst. we shall be pleased to perforate the stamps required by your Depot for 1/4% i.e. 3d for perforating £5's at a time. We beg to enclose an order form, and await your returned order for preparing the die free of charges.

We are Sir,  
Your obedient Servants  
H. R. Potts Sloper  
H. M. Office of Works  
Whitehall Palace

20 King William Street, City  
London 9<sup>th</sup> Aug 1895

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We are Sir

Your obedient Servants  
J. Sloper & Co

the Board of Trade perfin were perhaps mostly produced by the Board of Trade on machine(s?) supplied by Slopers (?). And perhaps some perfins were produced after the withdrawal of official stamps as a favour or to sell, to collectors. It is also thought that a number of dishonest dealers in the 1930's got together to get Slopers to make a perfin machine copying the Board of Trade perfin, was this illegal if they made no claim that the stamp was a genuine perfin? (What's a genuine perfin?). Were these dealers the same people producing Office of Works forged overprints? A surreal thought!

It is said that Board of Trade perfins would only have been used on mail going abroad as they had franking privileges in the UK, i.e. like the Revenue, it was just stamped "Official Paid" or similar, can anyone bear this out with unstamped Board of Trade covers? The withdrawal of all the official stamps was prompted by a scandal in the early 1900's. A clerk from Somerset House, Walter Richards and a well-known stamp collector, Anthony Creeke (with Hastings Wright he wrote "The Adhesive Stamps of the British Isles" still a definitive work) were charged with "liberating" officials stamps from Somerset House and selling them to Stanley Gibbons. In fact most of the official stamps were replaced in the Somerset House stock with un-overprinted ones, so the Revenue was not defrauded.

David Milstead has been able to research the small Office of Works and prove that covers and pieces in his display had genuine usage. He has also been able to "plate" the overprint and knows which particular position in the sheet a certain overprint came from. Some values, like the 10d had only a single sheet overprinted, and half of that was returned to Somerset House after the stamps were withdrawal and destroyed. Many more overprinted 10d's now exist than were ever printed! And apparently the ink used in the overprint and even the shade of the stamps that should have received the overprint, is very distinctive, making detection of forgeries easier.

I wish the task of discovering forged perfins (always assuming there are such things) was as easy. But then perhaps we haven't applied ourselves, if we make a list of what we don't know I think it's surprising we can make any statements about the Board of Trade perfin!

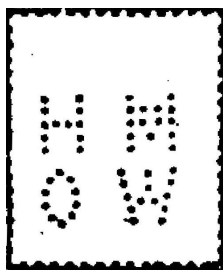
1. How many machines were there, how many heads did they have?
2. Who used them, what offices?
3. How were the stamps used?

We have discovered nothing so far in the Sloper records we have, we know little about the Board of Trade, they still exist (as the Dept of Trade and Industry), do they have records? I'm unsure we can draw many conclusions from the small number of covers and multiple perfins we have access to, I've tried to get information from non perfin collectors.

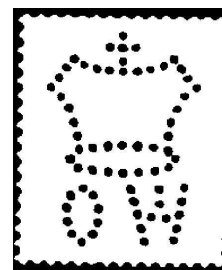
Statements made in this article are not necessarily true, they should not be taken as gospel truth, more as a basis for discussion and further research.

### **Office of Works Perfins**

There are two perfin dies known by the Office of Works. I assume Slopers made two dies, in the hope of more work from the Office of Works, like the Board of Trade. The dies are HM/OW (H5150.01) and Crown over OW (O2015.01), apparently the Crown over OW is rarer. For each die, Edwards and Lucas say just 2,400 ½d vermilion and 3,600 1d lilac were perforated, 6,000 stamps, value £20 for which Slopers would have charged 1/- at the rate they quoted, having prepared the dies free of charge! Some you win, some you lose! *[Ed – Maybe 2/- for the two dies!]*



H5150.01  
Type I - Lucas



O2015.01  
Type II - Lucas

### **Use of Official Stamps**

The information on overprinted stamps is summarised from Gibbons specialised catalogue, that on perfins from GB Official Perfins by Edwards and Lucas (1984).

Gibbons say the Inland Revenue were the first to use official stamps, in 1882, before that date official mail was franked with ordinary postage stamps purchased from the Post Office, the cash being refunded every quarter. I'm not sure when envelopes saying "Official Paid/Inland Revenue" were first used, this is the equivalent of free postage but I think it would only have applied for inland postage. Gibbons say that once the

official stamps were introduced they could be obtained on requisition by government departments. They were used by revenue officials in the provinces with mail to and from Head Office passing without a stamp. The London Office used these stamps only on foreign mail. A Post Office Circular dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 1882 stated “the PMG has approved the use on 1<sup>st</sup> October stamps overprinted I. R. Official for denoting postage and registration fees on letters transmitted by certain officers stationed outside the metropolis.”

If Edwards and Lucas are correct and if the Board of Trade perfin is an official stamp then they were first, coming into use on 27<sup>th</sup> January 1881.

I'm unsure about Edwards and Lucas's statement that the Board of Trade had no branches, at this time they dealt with harbours, the mercantile marine, finance, railways and fisheries, commerce, labour and statistics, under 5 assistant secretaries with a large staff of inspectors, surveyors and clerks etc. In 1883 control of the Patent Office and Bankruptcy passed to it and in 1888 the administration of Trade Marks. With railways are included canals and tramways, any undertaking requiring an Act of Parliament. They investigated all railway accidents. It had statutory powers in relation with lighthouses and pilotage, had duties to test the quality of petrol and gas and compiled statistics on trade.

From 1883 Government parcels stamps were issued to all departments. This was to avoid the 55% levy to the railway companies made when the parcel post was set up. With these stamps government parcels up to 3 lbs were sent by letter post.

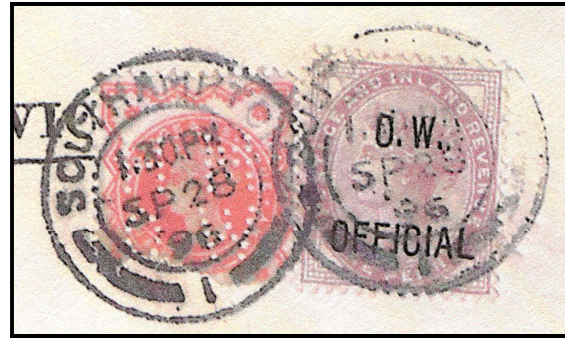
Office Of Works overprints were authorized on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1896 and the stamps were issued to Assistant Surveyors in Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool Southampton and the sub office in Manchester.

*[Ed:- Our catalogue shows O2015.01 used in Nottingham – but as far as I can ascertain the Office of Works had no office in Nottingham. Lucas also records an Office of Works perfin (exact die unknown) used in Liverpool 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 1896].*

They were also issued to the Clerk of Works stationed at various embassies abroad and the Head Office in London for foreign postage. David Milstead has a number of covers/pieces from the towns above, some with a 1d lilac overprint and a ½d vermilion perfin presumably paying the 2oz rate.



1d Lilac with O.W. Official overprint and 1/2d vermilion with HM/OW perfin. Liverpool Postmark of January 28<sup>th</sup> 1897



1d Lilac with O.W. Official overprint and 1/2d vermilion with HM/OW perfin. Southampton Postmark of September 28<sup>th</sup> 1897

Army Official stamps were supplied in September 1896 to the War Office and distributed to District and Station paymasters for use on local letters, letters to and from Head Office passed without postage.

The Board of Education stamps were the last to be issued in 1902

### **Withdrawal of Official Stamps**

It is said that this was on the 12<sup>th</sup> May 1904, but did this apply to BOT perfins, were they official stamps? Departmental overprints were used to ease accounting, instead of offices buying their own stamps and being refunded in arrears they could requisition overprinted stamps from Head Office. Of course it was also a better protection against theft than the less visible perfin. How did the Board of Trade obtain their stamps? Did they continue to buy them themselves and get refunded, but adding the perfin as a security measure, to prevent their resale back to the Post Office and to identify them in case of theft? Then why stop doing so? Perfins are not mentioned in the Richards/ Creeke trial.

### **Postscript**

I would like to hear of your holdings of Office of Works perfins including cancellations and dates of use. A late runner in the official perfin stakes was HM Stationary Office, crown over SO which was introduced in 1922 and changed to HM/SO in 1948, and then continued in use until 1985.

*[Ed:- The Sloper letter only refers to the production of only a single die. Can anyone explain why there were two dies apparently made for such a small usage over such a short period ?]*